

## **Libraries and the Stimulus: Putting America's Money Where the People Are**

*Key Points on Libraries and Economy*

### **More Americans turn to libraries during these hard economic times.**

- Every day across the country, libraries are meeting the needs of their communities by providing a broad range of services for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- A 2008 Harris Poll found that the number of adults with public library cards has reached a historic high at **68 percent**.
- **76 percent** of Americans visited their local public library in the past year, compared with **65.7 percent** two years ago.
- The public library plays an even more important role as Americans face tough economic times. Patrons are visiting their library for more than borrowing free books, movies, CDs and attending free reading programs.
- Libraries offer their communities no-fee access to computers and the Internet, financial literacy skills to help people keep their homes, assistance with job searches, help using e-government, and resources to help small businesses.
- Aiding job seekers was increasingly viewed as a critical role for public libraries, with **62.2 percent** of libraries reporting this service is critical to the library's mission, up from **44 percent** one year earlier.
- Libraries across the country are providing free public access to computers and the Internet in some of our most distressed communities. According to a recent report released by the American Library Association titled, "Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2007-2008," **73 percent** of all libraries nationwide report they are the only provider of no-fee Internet access in their communities. **In rural areas, the role of the public library is even more critical as 82 percent of libraries are the only free Internet provider.** As a result, many libraries have reported double-digit growth in computer usage in 2008.

### **Libraries need additional funding to address budget cuts and the demand for services.**

- As the economy continues to spiral down, the public's need for library services is steadily increasing. However, the resources available to libraries are decreasing; therefore, there is a growing need for more funding.
- Public libraries are facing severe cutbacks as budget shortfalls hit cities towns and rural areas across the country. While libraries are doing all they can to continue serving the public despite the budget cuts, libraries across the country are cutting

hours and services, and some are even facing the threat of closure at a time when their support is needed most.

- For funding, many public libraries depend on local property taxes, which have gone down roughly 3 percent according to the National League of Cities.
- At the same time public libraries are expanding technology services, and library visits average about 175 million each month, many libraries' budgets are decreasing. Funding data indicate volatility in how libraries support their public technology access. Even libraries with historically stable funding have reacted to flat funding by shifting to soft funding sources (fees/fines, donations and grants) as a way to support public computing services. Local government revenue and "other" (soft funding") account for nearly 90 percent of overall public library funding.
- Libraries are searching for new areas of funding, such as the Workforce Investment Act. For example, the Queens Borough Public Library has a partnership with the Workforce Board, and they receive Title 2 Workforce Investment Act Funding through New York State. They offer adult literacy, ESOL, and the adult basic education literacy. The funding also supports job information centers.
- These types of efforts help, but in order for libraries to continue to meet the growing demands of the public, they will need more help.